195. Broadening the Franchise.

MR. P. MADHAVAN VAIDYAN (*Member, Nominated*) spoke about the need for broadening the franchise in respect of the Legislative Council and the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly. Those two institutions were regarded as the two representative bodies in the State; but strictly speaking, they were not thoroughly popular in as much as the franchise was given only to certain taxpayers who formed but a section of the population. The ideal condition of those institutions could be reached only when universal franchise was given. As it was, he could not understand why the limits of Rs. 50 as land tax in the case of the Assembly and Rs. 5 in the case of the Council were fixed. The principle underlying all representative governments was that every individual should have a right to have his opinion considered. But in a country where the representatives were selected by a certain section of the people alone, the principle had no application. The Government had no doubt recognised the need for representing all interests in the Council and the Assembly, as would be evidenced from the creation of special constituencies for *Jenmies*, *Edavakas* and Planters. But it was regrettable that the labouring class, who outnumbered any other community, had no separate constituency. It might be argued that only those who had vested rights in the State should be given franchise. It was presumably on that principle that payment of tax was prescribed as a necessary qualification for voting. But he could not understand how the minima of Rs. 5 and Rs. 50 were fixed. The limits were quite arbitrary. In his opinion, all who were paying tax, irrespective of its amount, should be eligible to vote. Under the existing rules, franchise was given only to a minority of the taxpayers. That had adversely affected certain communities in the past two general elections. It was therefore necessary to give franchise to all taxpayers; and if that could not be done, the minimum property qualification should be fixed at Re. 1. The revision was rendered all the more necessary because of the changes that had occurred among the taxpayers as a result of the Nayar and the Ezhava Regulations. It was wrong to believe that, as a result of partitions of big Nayar or Ezhava *tarwads*, the number of voters had increased; on the other hand, the number was sure to be reduced at least so far as the Ezhavas were concerned. In the first year of the Ezhava Regulation, *viz.*, 1101, more than 23,700 *tarwads* were partitioned. As a result, many *tarwads* that had at least one vote each lost even that. The member therefore pleaded once again for the reduction of the property qualification for purposes of voting as suggested by him.

196. Reform of the Sri Mulam Popular Assembly.

MR. T. K. PADMANABHA PILLAI (*Member, Trivandrum taluk, Group I*) said that the question of reforming the Assembly had been brought before the Government at successive sessions of the Assembly, but it had not yet received the attention it deserved. Past history would show that the powers and privileges of the Assembly were curtailed from time to time. Originally, any subject could be discussed, but it was no longer the case. Further, a member was allowed to make only two representations, although he was obliged to remain in Trivandrum throughout the session.

Secondly, the members were not allowed to have a joint deliberation on any subject and the officers also had no voice in anything even when their measures and acts were questioned. That was not a happy state of affairs. Voting was the essence of a representative assembly and discussions alone gave an opportunity for exchanging views between the officers and the representatives of the people. At the fifth session of the Assembly, Sir P. Rajagopalachariar said "Travancore has in this Assembly an institution, which, with judicious development might be made most useful for purposes of good Government". If that hope was to be fulfilled, the Assembly Rules required suitable modification.

There was a certain section of the public opinion against the continuance of the Assembly, especially after the inauguration of the Legislative Council. But Mysore set an example in having two similar institutions side by side. The country at large and the members of the Legislative Council in particular had indicated the

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need for the continuance of the Assembly, which, in certain respects, was more important than the Council itself. It possessed a greater latitude in the range of subjects. It was in the Assembly that the Dewan sat in his full official capacity, while in the Council he was but its President. Formerly the Assembly had the power of electing members to the Council. The discontinuance of that power was one of the reasons for want of co-ordination between the two bodies. There would be better understanding between them if there were mutual elections of members to both the Houses. If public measures and politics were discussed in both the Houses, there would be greater guarantee of public safety. There would not also then be a feeling that one House was subordinate to the other. Under the rules, the Legislative Council had no power of voting on the receipts side of the budget. That power might with advantage be given to the Assembly. As it was, the representatives of the people could not influence the Government in regard to fresh taxation. The raising of the school fees, levy of market fees, increase in the Anchal rates, etc., were instances in point. People were glad that levy of fees in evening markets introduced by the previous Dewan had been stopped. It was the desire of the people that the Government should levy no additional tax, cess or rate, without the approval of one or the other of the two representative institutions of the State.

The members of the committee appointed to revise the Assembly Rules resigned their places, because they were not allowed to explore the channels necessary to make the Assembly really useful. The Assembly must have jurisdiction over legislative and administrative questions and the jurisdiction might be defined by a committee of experts. The minimum property qualification for franchise for the Assembly should also be reduced. Membership in the Assembly should be thrown open for women as in the case of the Legislative Council.

Lastly, the member suggested that the reform of the Assembly should be made on the following broad lines :—

(1) It should be made a statutory body.

(2) The legislative programme of each year should be placed before the Assembly for the general discussion of the principles of the bills and the Assembly should have power to record its opinion by votes and that opinion should be communicated to the Council.

(3) The Assembly should also be consulted in regard to bills passed by the Council before they are submitted for the sanction of the Sovereign.

(5) The range of subjects should be unrestricted, except in matters relating to the Ruling Family of Travancore and those relating to the relations between Travancore and the British Government governed by treaties.

(5) The Assembly should be granted power to move resolutions on matters of public interest.

(6) Resolutions passed by the Assembly and approved by the Council should be binding on the Government.

(7) Right of interpellation should also be granted.

(8) The Assembly should be given an opportunity for the general discussion of the budget.

The member hoped that the Dewan would take up the question of issuing a new set of Assembly Rules and make the institution worthy of the high expectation of His Highness the late Sri Mulam Tirunal and his talented minister Mr. V. P. Madhava Rao, who gave the people the first training in political and administrative matters.

DEWAN'S REPLY : Mr. Madhavan Vaidyan and Mr. Padmanabha Pillai, I have listened with interest to all that you had to say on the subject of reforming this Assembly. Now that I have presided over two of its sessions, I feel more inclined to express an opinion upon it than I should have been able to do before this session commenced. As a result of my experience, of what I have observed and noted and felt during the last two sessions, I find myself able to say this to you. That is, that this Assembly calls for reform, drastic reform, in short, a complete reformation. I shall endeavour to take up the question in all its aspects during the course of the next year so that, before this Assembly meets next year, you may, if I am able to fulfil my intentions, be in a position to know the lines upon which I propose to effect its reconstruction. (*Cheers*)

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